

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 4, 2021
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney

2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10
Psalm 48
2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Mark 6:1-13

Thomas Wolfe wrote about today's Gospel lesson: "You Can't Go Home Again."

Why does Jesus go back? Why would Jesus go back home to Nazareth? Does he have something to prove to his family, his friends, to himself. We don't know, but he goes, and not only does he walk the streets, but Jesus goes into his Synagogue and teaches on the Sabbath. And when he is finished, the murmuring starts.

“ ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him.”

I used to think that the people were offended because they knew Jesus when he was growing up so they couldn't see him for the man he was. He would be the kid who broke my wagon, or the boy who set fire to the field, or the one who broke my little girl's heart. That makes sense doesn't it? Like saying, "we know where you came from, how dare you pretend to preach at us."

But I just realized yesterday that wasn't it. These people are upset because Jesus doesn't know his place. This upstart has the temerity to teach. This uppity carpenter, this handy man, doesn't know his place.

You see, in that day, you were born into your place in life. The son of a carpenter would be a carpenter. If you wanted to be a priest, you had to be born into a family of priests. If you wanted to be anything other than whom you were born to be ... sorry, you're out of luck. Jesus didn't know his place.

We should identify with Jesus. We are a people who don't know our place. Today, 245 years ago a bunch of guys gathered in Philadelphia. And after weeks of quibbling over what was to be cut out and what was to be left in, they all signed a document called The Declaration of Independence, and proved just how out of place Americans could be.

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them ... Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

We look back from today and find fault with the founders. Many, if not most of them, owned slaves, including Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. What do we do with that. I saw an interview with African-American historian Dr. Annette Gordon-Reed, who wrote *“Most Blessed of the of the Patriarchs” : Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination*, as well as *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings*, and *The Hemingses of Monticello*.

Being the descendant of slaves, she maintained that there is no denying the foundation laid by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and the founders must be credited for that achievement, and at the same time acknowledging the faults in the way they failed to live up to the measure they set as the light of this nation, and their failings as men.

I am a veteran. I served four years in the Air Force. I served a year in Vietnam. I am descended from a man who served as a sergeant in the Army of the Continental Congress om the Revolutionary War, and another man who served in the Indiana Infantry Brigade in the Civil War, and who lost an arm at the Battle of Gettysburg.

I was raised to believe in this Country and what it stands for. Unfortunately, that does not excuse the errors we have made as a country in denying the rights to all our people. To celebrate the freedom we cherish, we must bear the weight of the injustices wrought against many of our people who were defined as other than US.

It seems ironic that many of those who came to these shores were the younger sons who would not inherit because they were born out of order too often forgot the lesson of their own origins in denying opportunities to others. But then they immigrated to this continent: Many were those who were poor and hoped for opportunity somewhere else. Many were the wretched refuse exported by England because they had no place. The colonies, America, offered the promise that would forever be denied anyone who wanted to be something other than what their fathers and mothers had been. Freedom from the past was the promise, and that promise started people talking about the rights of Englishmen.

Those conversations had been going around or some time that the colonies should be afforded the rights cherished by those in England. They wanted the freedoms and liberties shared by those who lived in the nation that claimed sovereignty over them. But that changed into a cry for independence.

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all ... are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them ... Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

And this was no small gesture. Had the colonies lost the war, or if the signers of the Declaration been captured, they would have been hanged, drawn and quartered for treason against the crown. But the Fourth of July was not the end of it. No, the Revolutionary War would go on till 1783. And that was not the end of it.

The Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution that ended slavery was not the end of it. The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment that gave women the vote was not the end of it. The passage of laws ensuring voting rights and civil rights and the right to be a citizen were not the end of it. The election of our first African-American President was not be the end of it. The election of the first woman and first African-American/Asian-American as Vice President is not the end of it. And the declaration of Juneteenth as a National Holiday was but another step toward another beginning.

If COVID has taught us anything, it is that we are all in this together.

There's a prayer in the back of the Book of Common Prayer, a thanksgiving for heroic service. It reads:

O Judge of the nations, we remember before you with grateful hearts the men and women of our country who in the day of decision ventured much for the liberties we now enjoy. Grant that we may not rest until all the people of this land share the benefits of true freedom and gladly accept its disciplines. This we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

It sounds like it's just for heroes, but I don't believe it is. I believe this is a prayer for each of us to stand up for those who are denied their rights, to stand up for those who are told they don't know their place. We are all the heroes who must live our lives in a perpetual cycle of living into the promise of these words.

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that ALL ... are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them ... Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

Those words speak of a promise that no one be defined by the accident of their birth, or the status of those who came before them, or the color of their skin, or the nature of their beliefs, or their gender, or who they are.

We celebrate July Fourth for good reason. We as Christians are called by our Baptismal Covenant to serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbor, to strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being.

In this land, each of us can be whatever we want to be without regard to our names, our histories or our heritage. We are born free because a bunch of guys got together and insisted on pushing back those who kept telling them to know their place, to sit down and shut up.

And LET US RESPOND:

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that ALL OF US are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them ... Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

We as Christians and as Americans can pledge ourselves to help fulfill the promise that we as a nation seek to live into in the words of that Declaration. That is truly who we are – a people, a nation, a gathering of those who have the temerity of not knowing our place, and proud of it. We are always seeking to perfect who we are as a nation.

If you would please turn to page 838 in the prayer book, and join with me in giving thanks and taking a pledge to work for the perfection of US as a people.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, giver of all good things:

We thank you for the natural majesty and beauty of this land.

They restore us, though we often destroy them.

Heal us.

We thank you for the great resources of this nation. They make us rich, though we often exploit them.

Forgive us.

We thank you for the men and women who have made this country strong. They are models for us, though we often fall short of them.

Inspire us.

We thank you for the torch of liberty which has been lit in this land. It has drawn people from every nation, though we have often hidden from its light.

Enlighten us.

We thank you for the faith we have inherited in all its rich variety. It sustains our life, though we have been faithless again and again.

Renew us.

Help us, O Lord, to finish the good work here begun.

Strengthen our efforts to blot out ignorance and prejudice, and to abolish poverty and crime. And hasten the day when all our people, with many voices in one united chorus, will

glorify your holy Name. *Amen.*

Amen.